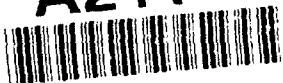
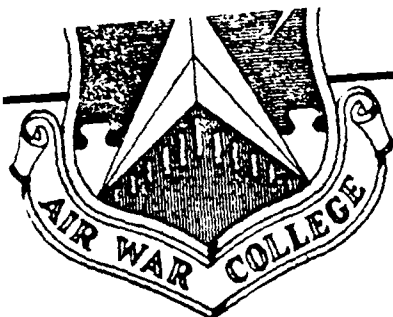


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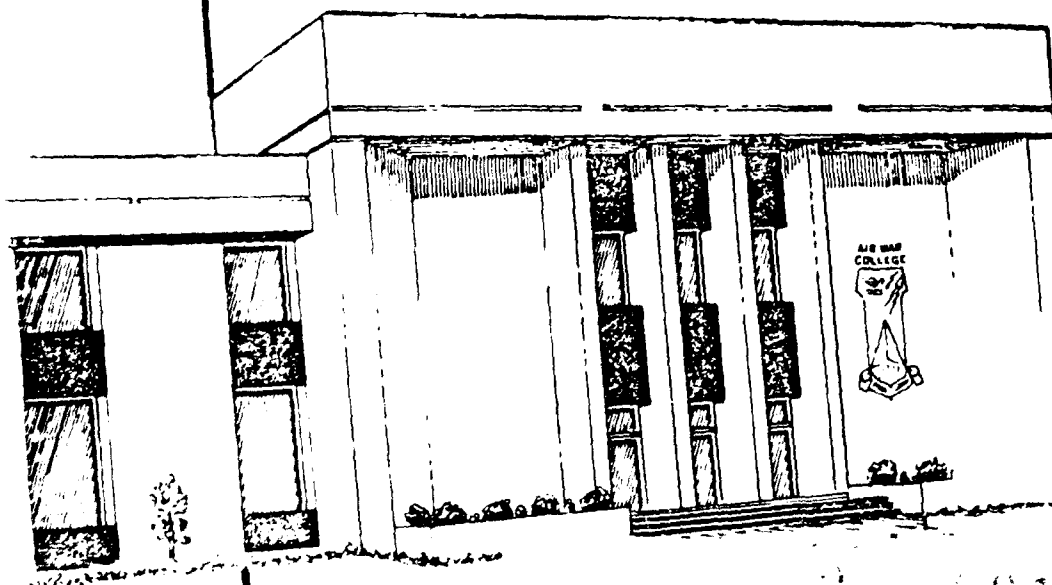
RESEARCH REPORT

COMBAT LEADERSHIP

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AIR UNIVERSITY
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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COMBAT LEADERSHIP

by

James M. Fisher
Lieutenant Colonel, USA



A DEFENSE ANALYTICAL STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM
REQUIREMENT

Advisor: Colonel Bryan Strickland

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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: Combat Leadership. AUTHOR: James M. Fisher, Lieutenant Colonel, USA.

Combat leadership differs from peacetime leadership in the high degree of physical courage required of the former. A soldier and a leader's courage is proportional to his perceived chances of success. Courage can be enhanced by providing stable, cohesive units and the most demanding, realistic training possible. Providing these elements to a leader of soldiers increases his chance of success in providing the physical courage required during war. In war physical courage must be recognized in individuals so that they can be promoted as necessary within the unit, thereby maintaining its stability and cohesiveness.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel James M. Fisher (M.A.J., Wichita State University) has been an enlisted soldier, a warrant officer and now a commissioned officer. He served in Vietnam as an Aviation Warrant Officer in 1968 and on the DMZ of Korea as a Captain in 1970-1971. He is a graduate of the Army Command and Staff College and the Australian Command and Staff College. His decorations include: Distinguished Flying Cross, 17 Air Medals (one with "V" device) and four Meritorious Service medals. Lieutenant Colonel Fisher is a graduate of the Air War College, Class of 1990.

Introduction

During times of peace, there is a concern that the Army and other services will breed managers instead of leaders, and they will lack the leadership skills necessary for combat.

Colonel David H. Hackworth on Issues and Answers implied that the top managers of the Army had mishandled Vietnam and that "there is a big difference between a leader, a combat leader and a manager." (1:888). He doesn't tell us what that difference is.

Abraham Zaleznik tells us that "managers often times feel threatened by leaders who are aggressive, eager to experiment and take risks and to change practices," (2:4-88). This statement too indicates a difference between a manager and a leader but does not totally define the difference.

This paper will not debate the difference but accept it and say that the difference is that managers deal with things and that leaders focus on people. (3:4-37) The focus of the paper will be on the ground war fighters at battalion level or below and the important skill of physical courage that is required for combat leaders. How are leaders best prepared? How is leadership replaced when lost at war?

Physical Courage

The skill, or characteristics of leadership vary from

writer to writer and leader to leader. We have "qualities" of a leader:

- Knowledge of the job
- Interest in subordinates
- Mental and physical energy
- Human understanding and compassion
- Stubbornness
- Imagination
- Character (4:4-4-4-6)
- Ability to follow
- Competitiveness
- Discipline
- Intelligence
- Stamina
- Courage
- Patriotism (5:4-61-4-62)

Lt General Catton talks about the "must" of leadership (6:4-89) and General Maxwell Taylor calls them "Leadership attributes" (7:4-7) and likens them to an opinion of a distinguished justice of the Supreme Court who wrote on obscenity, "I can't define it but I sure know it when I see it." (7:4-8) Perhaps Lt General Lewis H. Brereton (USAF retired) best explained when he noted that to try to define leadership limits its scope. "Leadership is much too complex to be imprisoned by words. Nevertheless, we know leadership

is demonstrated by a man's ability to influence others--to have them follow enthusiastically as well as instinctively." (6:4-89)

The United States Army seeks in its leaders courage, candor, competence, and commitment (8:90) with courage being both moral and physical. Col Glover S. John served as an aide-de-camp to Gen Patton during World War II, fought at Normandy and as a battalion commander captured the French town of St Lo. (1:355) Col John lists enthusiasm, fairness and moral and physical courage as four of the most important aspects of leadership. (1:403)

A common theme from author to author is that to be a leader requires courage; both moral and physical. Moral courage is required of leaders routinely in peace and war, but physical courage is another matter. Physical courage can certainly be demonstrated occasionally in peacetime but not tested as it is in war. This day-to-day requirement for physical courage in combat leadership differs from peacetime, but is it a skill?

Courage is not the absence of fear. Rather it is managed fear, the ability to do what should be done in spite of fear. "It is the domination of will over instinct" and as such is a skill. (8:138) Some people appear to manage fear naturally; some can be taught the skill or at least have it enhanced, and in some the skill is lost. "A soldier feels

fear in direct proportion to his belief that he may fail." (8:138) To help him overcome we must build competence and confidence by training and setting the example, thus preparing him for war.

Leaders view courage as an essential binding influence for unity of action. In holding strong to fundamental principles of leadership, effective leaders see themselves under a continuous challenge to prove, by one means or another, the quality and character of their person. Courage is indispensable if leaders expect to give direction to the lives of other people. (3:4-41)

"In peacetime, gaining combat leadership experience is normally impossible... Of the more than 50 U.S. Army Corps commanders in World War II, most of whom were splendid leaders, none had major leadership experience prior to Pearl Harbor." (9:61) In modern wars, however, these commanders' duties relegate them to the rear and the majority of soldiers never see them. "Consequently the task of influencing and understanding the psychology has, in large measure, passed to subordinate commanders." (10:10) This paper then will deal only with individuals and small units.

This first layer of leadership is direct leadership and is at the battalion level or below. "This is the level of confronting the enemy and caring for one's soldiers with a deep and abiding concern. This is the level where soldiers and their personal concerns are known." (11:55) This knowledge of men is extremely important and difficult.

Difficult for two reasons: first because it cannot be learned from books; second, because the characteristics of

the individual in peace are completely changed in war. Man reacts differently in war than he does in peace; therefore, he must be handled differently. (10:9-10)

Col Bryant Moore may have summed it up best on Guadalcanal when he, after relieving approximately 25 officers, said,

The good (courageous) leaders seem to get killed; the poor (uncourageous) leaders get the men killed. The big problem is leadership and getting the shoulder straps on the right people.... If you can find who the good patrol officers are before you hit the combat zone, you have found out something. (4:4-4)

It is important in peace to find who the warriors are.

Emergent Leaders

From the efficiency report of Cpt George Patton Jr., "This man would be invaluable in time of war but is a disturbing element in time of peace." (1:623) If courage is a pre-requisite for combat leadership, and we can't be totally sure of its presence until we go to war, what do we do about it? How do we make sure we have our Pattons and Rommels when we go to war? There are basically three things that are required: courage, stability, and training. This paper will deal with each separately, but they are highly dependent on each other.

First, we must recognize courage in our leaders while they are involved in combat and put it to its best use. During the Civil War, World War I, World War II, and at the beginning of the Korean conflict it was a common practice to reward demonstrated courage and leadership with instant promotions and even battlefield commissions. Two of the best

known from Korea were Anthony B. Herbert and David H. Eackworth.

Herbert enlisted in the army at 17 without a high school education. After serving a year and a half he returned home and graduated from high school and reentered the army to fight in Korea. He returned to combat without a course in leadership. (12:16) His leadership and courage were demonstrated again and again with events such as leading attacks on hills and individually charging and neutralizing machine gun placements, finishing with a bayonet broken off in him. (13:55) Senior officers looked to him for leadership and advice. (12:173) He refused the first commission offered him (he cited lack of education) and was subsequently promoted to master sergeant. In two years of combat and at the age of 22, Herbert had reached the highest enlisted rank in the United States Army. (12:145) At the completion of his time in Korea he had become the most decorated soldier in history and had listed among his awards, two Presidential Unit citations, three Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars with "V" device, four Purple Hearts, and had become the only foreigner to receive the Osminich (the Turkish Medal of Honor). (12:8)

Herbert's leadership was recognized again and again with command positions. One of his commanders said, 'Because of his success commanding the Ranger , Tony was selected to command Company B 2/505 though still a junior officer, even

though that assignment involved command once again of officers senior to him in rank." (12:186) He was subsequently promoted early to both major and lieutenant colonel. (12:186-187)

Herbert ultimately was not successful in Vietnam, but he was a victim of the war and not of poor leadership or lack of courage. Out of his Vietnam experience evolved his ideas of leadership and the problems in Vietnam. He felt that one problem was "poor leadership and, more specifically, absentee leadership" (13:134) and when speaking of another commander he said,

He had everything except the one trait which I consider most essential: the ability or the guts (courage) to lead by example. I think you've got to be there--not 1500 feet up in a chopper on the radio--and I think you've got to produce. All the rest is eyewash. (13:194)

David H. Hackworth's career resembles Herbert's to a great degree. He enlisted at 15 years of age, received a battlefield commission at 20 and was wounded four times before his 21st birthday. His accomplishments were done without benefit of education or leadership classes. He didn't graduate from college until 1964. (13:448).

Hackworth's courage was legendary. Ward Just said of him,

He understood the atmosphere of violence, meaning he knew how to keep his head, to think in danger's midst. In battle the worst thing is paralysis. He mastered his own fear and learned how to kill. He led by example and his men followed. (1:15)

A sergeant major said of him, "He had a unique trait of courage about him which was kind of amazing." (1:59)

Hackworth, like Herbert, would attack a machine gun by himself in order to pick up broken morale in a unit and to restore order. (13:521) Such events throughout his career make him the most decorated living American soldier today. (1:9)

These are but two examples of courageous leaders who proved themselves in war and were promoted for it. John Essex-Clark, an Australian warrior admired greatly by Col Hackworth received "one of the last battlefield commissions in the British Army in World War II." (1:495)

Stability

This practice of battlefield commissions did not exist in Vietnam. The closest parallel was the direct commissioning of predominately warrant officer aviators, most of whom had repetitive tours in combat. Significantly, Army Aviation performance was praised in Vietnam and the aviators were noted for their bravery almost universally. Almost any soldier or airman that needed medical evacuation will attest to that bravery. The absence of battlefield commissions in the last half of Korea and all of Vietnam was not because of the absence of courageous leaders, but rather the absence of the second of the three things we need to do to ensure combat leadership when we need it. We can't fight another war with

the instability brought about by fighting a war with "tours" and individual replacements. Hackworth said, "It's always a bitch to join a new unit (particularly one as tight as the Wolfhounds) as an individual replacement. You don't know anyone, and no one trusts you until you've proved yourself in battle." (1:61) Herbert was sent to look for Turks by himself as a new replacement to a unit and drew the conclusion, "It was another lesson of war: If you don't belong to the unit, you can be spared." (12:24)

What are the benefits of stable units with stable leadership? What is it that adds to a person's courage and makes the leader and soldier more apt to succeed in combat? It is two things, the bonding that goes on and the knowledge of each other.

Bonding is what makes units like the 82nd, 101st, and Special Forces elite units with good leadership and good soldiers. It is the bonding of shared danger. (1:441)

Soldiers have needs: physical, security, and social. This social need includes the need for self-respect, status, comradeship, love and appreciation, and the need to belong to a group and to be respected by others in that group. (8:144) Hackworth said,

The incredible bonding that occurred through shared danger; the implicit trust in the phrase 'cover me'-- these were the things that kept me going, kept me fighting here in Korea, and why I'll come back for more. The most important thing was that I knew with other troopers respect came their trust: they knew that I

wouldn't let them down. Sure, I was fighting for America, for all that was "right" and "true", for the flag, the national anthem, and Mom's apple pie. But all that came second to the fact that the reason I fought was for my friends. (11:111)

The longer one is in a unit the more attached he is to it. (11:282) As this attachment grows, the more he does things for the unit, his friends, and himself.

In peace we teach that every private should know the situation, but in war knowledge of the full situation is not as important. The soldier actually has a lack of interest in the big picture and is satisfied if things are going well for him. (10:48) A German soldier said,

Generally, the soldier of the front thinks only in terms of the present; he lives from day to day. If a combat action is successful, he is pleased. He is not concerned with the great strategic results of battle; his thoughts revolve only about himself, his friends, and his immediate surroundings. (10:57)

Some leaders fail to build the bonds of "mutual respect, trust, confidence and understanding that are fundamental to a disciplined, cohesive fighting unit," and do so because of instability in the unit. (8:61) In Vietnam this instability was caused by "tours" and "ticket punching."

Ardant du Picq wrote,

A wise leader ensures that the personnel of combat groups change as little as possible, so that comrades in peacetime maneuvers shall be comrades in war. Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare attack a lion. Four less brave, but knowing each other well, sure of their reliability and consequently of mutual aid, will attack resolutely. (8:157)

Can there be a clearer argument for sending units to war, not individuals?

It is necessary that the commanders know their soldiers, that the soldiers know the commander and that the soldiers know each other. Adolph Von Schell said,

The great commanders of all times had a real knowledge of the souls of their soldiers. Let us use a more simple phrase and call this knowledge of soul 'knowledge of men.' Knowledge of men in all wars has proved an important factor to the leader. (10:9)... No commander lacking this inner knowledge of his men can accomplish great things. (10:10)

The commander must know his soldiers.

Col Hackworth commented after losing a battle in the absence of his company commander that,

Had Capt Michaely been there from the beginning, we as a company would have held. Continuity of command is very important on the battle field. Besides, Lieutenant Petersen wasn't cut out to be a company commander. He was too nervous and we heard his every quiver. (1:108)

A soldier must know his commander.

Col Hackworth said of two of his soldiers,

Roger Young was a legend, and his very name got many soldiers through the night. Living legends serve a similar purpose. If the troops go into battle secretly knowing that among them lurks a Scooter Burke--a superman in Clark Kent ODs--they fight better, they'll fight harder, and they'll somehow believe that immortality is theirs too. (1:177)

In combat nothing is more important to the soldier than thinking he can succeed. He needs a feeling of invulnerability, to believe the enemy will die, to be victorious. (9:57) The soldiers must know each other.

The United States Army went into World War I, World War II, and Korea with a large percentage of our soldiers as members of the Reserves or National Guard. These people came to war to fight it, win it, and get it over with so they could get back to their families and making a living. (13:241) It had worked before and could work again--and then in the middle of Korea "the army introduced 'rotation'." (13:241) Individuals could go home, replaced by new men starting their tours. There was a reward before the end of the rainbow, a way out short of winning.

It was the worst plan the army had ever put into effect. Men became cautious. They put in their time and stayed alive. Soldiers no longer belonged to a unit, they served in one until they completed a tour and then served in another. It was the beginning of the end. (12:87)

We not only used this method in Korea but carried it into Vietnam as well. This method aids the decline in one's ability to manage fear and does not allow time to identify the courageous leaders.

Col Hackworth commented on this system of tours in Vietnam,

As the U.S. war in Vietnam expanded and units began to be deployed not on the basis of combat readiness, but on Westmoreland's need for more troops, any emphasis there might have been on a unit orientation quickly changed to an individual one, i.e. replacements for units already in the field. In this system the troops' complete bewilderment upon arrival in Vietnam had to be dealt with by complete strangers whose 'teams' they joined despite having no connection with their new teammates or understanding of the nature of the game being played. (1:634)

Herbert summed it up, "I had learned my lesson in Korea. Rotation had been established, and tigers became pussies." (13:199) On top of this we added "ticket punch" command tours. Battalion commanders served six months. Company commanders served three months, or in Hackworth's words, "just long enough to figure out what they didn't know." (1:524)

Col Hackworth said of Delta Force,

Pound for pound and weighed against its costs, was the most effective fighting force in Vietnam. Project Delta was infinitely successful with its tactics, doctrine, and a basic philosophy, completed at odds with the Army's regular units. (1:571)

He was right! Having served a tour with the unit in Vietnam, I can explain why. The vast majority of the members of this unit had been in the country over two years, some for as long as six. It changed commanders not more than once a year (usually at 18-month intervals) unless a death occurred. The aviation support (which has already been discussed) was filled with people on repetitive tours and two majors that had been in the aviation support for Project Delta for six continuous years.

Training

The third and final leg of the three legged stool on which combat leadership stands is training. Good training and stable units will provide the combat leader the best chance to be a courageous leader.

One of the men most admired by Col Hackworth was Captain Jack Michaely, his company commander in Korea. Captain Michaely had received his training for Korea and the conflict in World War II.

"I learned in World War II", he said, "that the slightest bit of excitement in a leader is transmitted to his men. You might be afraid but the fear gets magnified in the troops. Somebody has to keep his cool, If you are a decent leader, you don't dare lose it--for your own good. You've got to keep your unit up there doing its job."
(1:81)

He had received his training and understood human nature. To understand and motivate people and to develop a cohesive, disciplined, well-trained unit, you must understand human nature. "S.L.A. Marshall said that the starting point for the understanding of war is human nature." (8:135)

Col Hackworth was of the school that leadership was not something you could learn from study. His view was "Sure, you could sit a guy down and teach him the principles of it, but command itself came from experience, from on-the-job training under solid vets and from doing it yourself."
(1:440) Of Hackworth's leadership ability it was observed that

He was the kind of guy who understood the necessity to drive people beyond what their normal capability might be. He made us all understand that combat is a battle of wills as much as it is a battle of physically doing in the enemy, and you've really got to be a stronger-willed fighter than he is if you eventually want to beat him. And he was able to impart that to his commanders very well. (1:501)

All former combat leaders recognize the need for training and that it must be hard and realistic. Col Ace Elliot, a distinguished military police officer, felt that even the AWOL problem during Vietnam was nothing but a lack of training. Out of that grew the very successful correctional facility at Ft Riley, Kansas, specifically for the AWOL "where they could get the concentrated training they had obviously not received to date." (1:596) Hackworth also felt that hard realistic training coupled with strong, caring, tactically proficient leaders was an absolute necessity. (1:820) In his words, "Training for war must be realistic at all costs. Training casualties, tragic as they may be, must be accepted as an occupational hazard in the tough and dangerous business of soldiering." (1:821)

Col Hackworth had learned as a young soldier, from noncommissioned officers from World War II, the importance of "drill, drill, stay alert, stay alive." (1:15) The importance of that idea is that "A hallmark of crisis leadership is keeping things simple--asking people to do things that they are already trained to do and not asking them to do new things with which they are unfamiliar." (9:55)

In order to prepare men for combat we must train as closely as possible to the conditions they will encounter. (1:308) The importance of this concept was not lost on Adolph Von Schell, who observed,

Therefore if you would train for the realities of war, take your men into unknown terrain, at night, without maps and give them difficult situations. In doing so use all the imagination you have. Let the commander make their decisions. Teach your men that war brings surprises and they will find themselves in apparently impossible situations. (10:63)

If you aspire to or have achieved leadership, you have to have perseverance. You must stick to difficult tasks and see them through to completion regardless of how difficult they may be. (14:4-41)

A small-unit leader's ability in combat and his willingness to take calculated risks "are determined to a large extent by the SOP he has learned, the rules he has learned to follow, and the thinking he has had to do in peacetime." (11:57) "If SOP, drills, rules, training, and leadership are right, the small units are cohesive and battle ready." (11:55)

All units must train together before going into war. Such training didn't happen in Korea or Vietnam and on the part of the German army in some cases in World War I. One German soldier observed,

It is my belief that the heavy burden occasioned by the new impressions of battle would have been considerably lessened had there existed that feeling of unity and that material understanding which long service together engenders between officers and men. (10:20)

Whether or not leadership can be taught is open to debate. If it can, I agree with Col Hackworth--it will have

to be done with hands-on training. Von Schell may have said it best.

To be an officer means to be a leader--to be a leader of troops in battle. It is certainly correct that leaders, like great artists, are born and not made; but even great artists require years of hard study and practice before he masters his art. So it is with the military leader; if he is to learn the art of war, he must practice with the tools of that art. (10:93)

We must have cohesive, well-trained units in order to give our leaders the best advantage of managing their fear. Ultimately some will fail even then, and we should be prepared and willing to replace those with the emergent courageous leaders on the battlefield.

Analysis

The Army in the past decade has been dedicated to hard, realistic training. The National Training Center and the Joint Readiness Training Center provide the most realistic training available short of war. Training must continue at this intensity during the next decade even in the face of austere budgets. Force structure must be cut--not training.

With fewer forward deployed troops, stability should become paramount in units. Soldiers should be promoted within units and sent to individual training such as service schools and returned to that unit--not another.

Finally, if war comes, units should be sent--not individuals, and the unit should stay until it is incapable of combat. Leaders need to be replaced from within by promotions

and/or battlefield commissions. When the unit becomes incapable it should be withdrawn and replaced by a like unit and not individual replacements. Only when reconstituted and retrained should it return to combat, but again as a unit. Total unit assignment will aid the leader and his soldiers to demonstrate the physical courage war requires

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